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WHO SPENDS MORE FOR CLOTHES -
FATHER, MOTHER, OR THE CHILDREN

A radio dialogue between Miss Ruth Van Deman, Bureau of Home Economics, and Mr. Wallace Kadderly, Office of Information, broadcast Thursday, March 31, 1938, in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Hour, by the National Broadcasting Company and a network of 93 associated radio stations.

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U.S. Department of Agriculture

WALLACE KADDERLY:

Here we are in Washington. And several members of the Washington Branch of the Farm and Home family are gathered here to give you news of their particular parts of the Department of Agriculture. First comes Ruth Van Deman - all prepared she tells me to give us another report from the Consumer-Purchases Study. This is a nation-wide study that the Bureau of Home Economics and several other Federal agencies are making at the request of business men and consumers. That right, Ruth?

RUTH VAN DEMAN:

Perfect, Mr. Kadderly. I'd just like to add that the United States Chamber of Commerce presented the request from the business people in a formal resolution back in 1932. They urged that we gather information (I'm quoting the exact words they used) "concerning the national requirements of people at various standards of living as determined by their income, the size of family, geographical differences, and skill in management."

KADDERLY:

Quite an order.

VAN DEMAN:

Quite. It's a tremendous job to handle the figures from tens of thousands of families, on what they spend for food, and clothing, and all the rest of the items in the family budget.

KADDERLY:

Well, those figures you gave us a few weeks ago about the family automobile were very illuminating.

VAN DEMAN:

Maybe these on clothing costs today will surprise you.

KADDERLY:

Do they tell how much women spend for clothes?

VAN DEMAN:

Yes, and men too. And there's the joker. There isn't very much difference.

KADDERLY:

Not much difference!

VAN DEMAN:

No. Here's a table with figures on over 3,000 husbands and wives in seven cities in the Middle West.

(over)

KADDERLY:

Let me see - Lincoln, Illinois. Boone, Iowa - - -

VAN DEMAN:

Columbia and Moberly, Missouri. Mt. Vernon and New Philadelphia, Ohio - - -

KADDERLY:

That's six.

VAN DEMAN:

And Beaver Dam, Wisconsin. These are all white, self-supporting families - none of them on relief. They had incomes all the way up to and over \$5,000 for the year 1935-36.

KADDERLY:

So I see.

VAN DEMAN:

And look at those averages for all clothing - husbands - - -

KADDERLY:

\$52

VAN DEMAN:

And wives - - -

KADDERLY:

\$56. Amazing!

VAN DEMAN:

That's the way with facts sometimes.

KADDERLY:

But, Ruth, surely that \$56 doesn't include women's hats.

VAN DEMAN:

Oh, yes, it does. See those words at the top of the column - hats, berets. And the average for the year \$3 - - -

KADDERLY:

I wouldn't have believed it.

VAN DEMAN:

And over here for the husbands - hats and caps, \$3.

KADDERLY:

I'm speechless, Ruth.

VAN DEMAN:

It doesn't leave much room for teasing us about our Easter bonnets - - -

KADDERLY:

Well, not as extravagance, maybe. But you can't expect us to take women's hats seriously.

VAN DEMAN:

Oh no. We don't ourselves.

KADDERLY:

Well, are these figures on men's and women's clothes typical of the whole country?

VAN DEMAN:

Fairly. Of course there are some differences in different parts of the country. In small cities on the Pacific Coast for instance, husbands spent an average of \$66 a year on their clothes, and wives \$76. And all over the country in farm and village families the clothing bills were less than in the cities.

KADDERLY:

But the women always had the edge a little bit?

VAN DEMAN:

Not at all. In many farm families the men spent a few dollars more for their clothes than the women did. And the young sons and daughters of the social age, stepping out a good deal to parties and social events generally spent more for clothes than either mother or dad.

KADDERLY:

I can well believe that.

VAN DEMAN:

And maybe you know that for school children shoes cost more than anything else in their bill for clothing. We're releasing a story to the papers today with figures from four cities in Oregon and Washington State.

KADDERLY:

Which four, may I ask? This is indeed hearing from home.

VAN DEMAN:

Astoria ---

KADDERLY:

(At the mouth of the Columbia River - the big salmon canning center.)

VAN DEMAN:

Eugene - home of the State university, I happen to know.

KADDERLY:

That one of your stops last summer?

VAN DEMAN:

No. Drove through - that's all. We were sorry we couldn't stay. And Klamath Falls ---

KADDERLY:

A busy, bustling little city in a rich agricultural and lumbering region in southwestern Oregon.

VAN DEMAN:

And Olympia, Washington, on Puget Sound.

KADDERLY:

Home of the Olympia oyster and southern gateway to the scenic Olympic peninsula. Well, Ruth, that's a very well-picked sample of small cities in the Northwest - very typical.

VAN DEMAN:

And I think probably these shoe bills are typical of what parents in lots of places are spending on footwear for the youngsters. These figures include repairs too, by the way.

KADDERLY:

A big item.

VAN DEMAN:

These costs are for youngsters 6 to 11 years. The shoes for the girls cost from \$7 a year up to \$17 - depending on what the family's income was. And the boys ---

KADDERLY:

Yes, did the boys top that?

VAN DEMAN:

No. They ran from \$7 to \$12. There didn't happen to be any boys in the highest income class - so the two sets of figures are not exactly comparable.

KADDERLY:

Probably the boys and girls ran about the same on shoes.

VAN DEMAN:

Probably. On cost of all clothing the boys started at \$22 and ran to \$43. And the girls from \$16 to \$56.

KADDERLY:

That was for a whole year?

VAN DEMAN:

Yes, sir - 52 weeks during 1935-36.

KADDERLY:

What about the young folks of that very social age, you spoke of a moment ago?

VAN DEMAN:

I only have totals for them. I don't have their clothing costs broken down into separate items for shoes, hats, coats, and so on, as for the children. But for averages of all clothing for the year for the young men from 16 to 29 years in these Northwest cities (let me get the right column here) --- \$30 to \$150.

KADDERLY:

\$30 to \$150 for young men. And the young women ---

VAN DEMAN:

\$45 to \$155 - not very much more for all the feminine fripperies.

KADDERLY:

Ruth, these statistics of yours are very disconcerting. Very hard on entrenched masculine ideas.

VAN DEMAN:

Well, if I've made a dent in entrenched masculinity I'd better stop right there with the figures. I have something here about clothes that's historical and very feminine. It's about an outfit that a young French woman was ordering to wear to a wedding on a Virginia plantation in the spring of 1787.

KADDERLY:

About 150 years ago.

VAN DEMAN:

151, if you want to be statistical. This lady was the wife of one of Lafayette's soldiers. And after the Revolution they decided to settle down as colonists. This is a little bit of one of her letters home to her mother-in-law in France. She writes:

"I am having some new clothes made for this occasion and have ordered a frock and hat in Philadelphia. Gaston said this was a fearfully extravagant thing to do, but, then, my dear Mother-in-Law, I still have the five louis you so kindly gave me when we bade goodby. I used them with the feeling that you would approve my wish to show people here how French women can dress on solemn occasions. So I shall wear a gown and coat of white Chambéry gauze with pink, and a pink waist trimmed with the lace you gave me when I married, and pink ribbons in bows over crepe flounces and wreathes of pink roses across the gauze sleeves and the pinafore in front. With it I shall wear a coiffure composed of one large pink bow, held in place by a steel buckle, and a wreath of roses around my head. My hair will, of course, be powdered, with curls falling on my neck."

KADDERLY:

Very charming. But I don't blame Gaston for being a little worried about the bill.

VAN DEMAN:

But it was her own money.

KADDERLY:

The perfect alibi.

VAN DEMAN:

Remember it's spring, Wallace. A woman's likely to be rather tolerant on the clothes question this time of year.

KADDERLY:

Most everyone is.

VAN DEMAN:

Well, just to top off with, here's something very practical.

KADDERLY:

"Quality guides in buying ready-made dresses." Yes, I think I've seen this before.

VAN DEMAN:

I'm sure you have. It's Clarice Scott's shopping guide for a woman who wants to get her money's worth when she steps out to buy the new spring frock. If you just turn over to the last page, there's her list of points to look for when buying a dress.

KADDERLY:

Here?

VAN DEMAN:

Yes.

KADDERLY:

"Style and fabric suited to your needs."

VAN DEMAN:

"A label that tells what kind of fibers are in the material." (So you can tell which are silks and synthetics, and cottons, and linens.")

KADDERLY:

And "definite information about shrinkage, weighting, or sizing, and color-fastness to sunlight and washing."

VAN DEMAN:

Well, we haven't time to go all down the list, Wallace. I must be signing off.

KADDERLY:

But I take it you meant this leaflet is available to anybody who wants it.

VAN DEMAN:

That's the idea.

KADDERLY:

Thank you, Ruth, for coming over today with all this interesting information on clothing. Homemakers --- let me give you the title and number of this leaflet again. "Quality guides in buying ready-made dresses," Leaflet 105. If you'd like a copy for your consumer buying file, just send a card to Miss Ruth Van Deman at the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C., and ask for Leaflet 105 - "Quality guides in buying ready-made dresses."